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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 001152

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/AGS -- VIKMANIS-KELLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/08/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN DEFENSE MINISTER TO RECOMMEND AUSTRIAN
DEPLOYMENT TO KONDUZ FOR ELECTION; WILL REVIEW CAVEATS

REF: STATE 60862

Classified By: AMBASSADOR W.L. LYONS BROWN. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting requested by the Ambassador, Austrian Defense Minister Platter informed Ambassador that while he must still obtain approval by the government and the Standing Committee in Parliament, he will propose sending approximately 70 Austrian soldiers to Konduz, Afghanistan, to help in providing security for the September 18 elections. Platter also told Ambassador he wants good relations with the U.S., fully understands U.S. sensitivity over the recent sale of sniper rifles to Iran, and sought U.S. understanding of why he may, during future visits to Austrian peacekeeping troops on the Golan Heights, meet on occasion as he has done in the past with the Syrian Defense Minister. END SUMMARY

12. (C) Ambassador delivered reftel points on national caveats to Austrian Defense Minister Platter on April 7, 2005. Ambassador complemented the Minister on Austrian flexibility in KFOR and encouraged the Minister to be similarly flexible in Afghanistan. Ambassador specifically suggested expanding the Austrian mandate beyond Kabul and keeping restrictions on the type of mission employment to a minimum that will allow ISAF commanders to use Austrian soldiers as needed.

13. (C) Minister Platter thanked Ambassador for noting Austria's efforts in the Balkans and said he understood the potential difficulties national caveats can place on military commanders. He informed the Ambassador he supports new Austrian contributions to Afghanistan and will soon present to the Council of Ministers a proposal to send approximately seventy Austrian soldiers to Afghanistan for up to three months to support ISAF security efforts for the September 18 elections. He stressed that while the proposal must first be approved by the Council of Ministers and by the Standing Committee in Parliament, he has spoken to the Chancellor and the Foreign Minister on this proposal and has their support. Platter went on to explain that his proposal envisions deployment to Konduz, which moves Austrian soldiers out of Kabul for the first time, thereby responding favorably to Ambassador's suggestion that current Austrian caveats allowing deployment in Kabul only should be expanded. In addition, he said he would review the Kabul-only restriction, approved by the parliamentary Standing Committee, that is part of the current mandate authorizing up to ten Austrian personnel to work in ISAF headquarters (he noted that Austria has three people so assigned at present, as well as two, under a different mandate, with the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan).

14. (C) Rifles to Iran. Minister Platter expressed to the Ambassador his desire that Austria wants to support NATO/PfP and maintain good relations with the United States. He said he hopes the frictions over the recent Steyr-Mannlicher sales of sniper rifles to Iran have subsided, and he understands the need to be careful in dealings with Iran. The Minister's Chief of Staff, Major-General Bauer, interjected to explain once again that the Defense Ministry, under the Austrian coordination process, is charged with reviewing such proposals only to see if they have any potential impact on Austria soldiers abroad. While it was clear the proposed sale had broader ramifications that the Defense Ministry recommended should be considered, the Defense Ministry itself officially could only consider the potential impact as described.

15. (C) Syria. Minister Platter also asked the Ambassador whether from the US perspective the situation with Syria has improved now that Syria has announced its intention to withdraw all forces from Lebanon by the end of April. Platter explained to the Ambassador that Austria still has some 370 soldiers on the Golan Heights - they have been there now 30 years in the UN mission) and that as Defense Minister he visits the Austrian soldiers there regularly. He noted that from time to time it has been appropriate to meet during such visits with the Syrian Defense Minister to maintain a supportive environment for the Austrian soldiers engaged in this peacekeeping mission. Ambassador observed that the US is waiting to see whether Syria lives up to its announced intentions to withdraw its military forces, but even if they are withdrawn as announced, there remains the

issue of Syrian security and intelligence forces in Lebanon. Ambassador noted that the earlier planned visit by the President of Syria to Austria certainly had been undesirable politically and that the US Government and others were sensitive to such political contacts. After the meeting Maj Gen Bauer asked privately of the Ambassador whether it might help Minister Platter in doing his visits to the Austrian contingent in Golan if the Austrians were to let the US know in advance if the proposed visit would include routine contact with the Syrian Defense Minister. Ambassador replied it is certainly better to know about things in advance so they can be discussed, if need be.

16. (C) COMMENT: We consider this proposal to send Austrian forces to support elections in Afghanistan, if approved, to be a very positive step forward. While we would like ultimately to see Austria participating longer term in one of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, the election security support mission is a logical and politically realistic step forward from the current mandate for up to ten staff officers only in Kabul only. Austria continues to deploy over 500 troops in KFOR, nearly 300 in Bosnia, some 370 in Golan, and recently announced its intention to provide five personnel starting in May to the UN mission in Sudan. Austria's deployment of nearly 100 personnel for Tsunami relief in Sri Lanka only returned in mid February. The proposal now to send seventy soldiers to elections in Afghanistan will allow a further testing of the waters politically.

Brown